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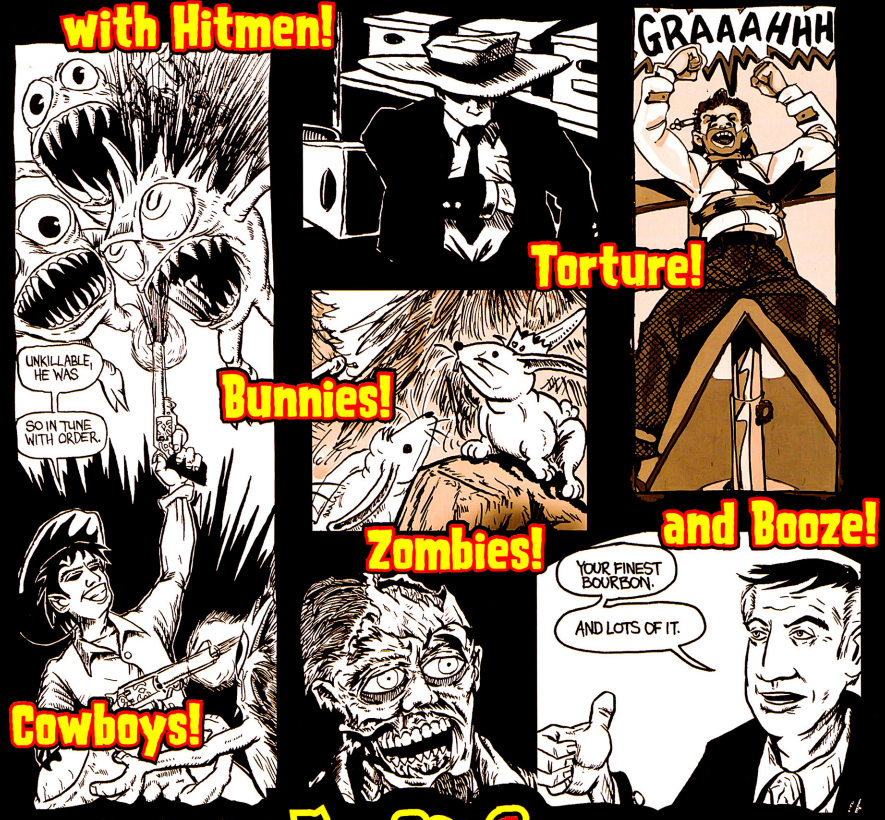

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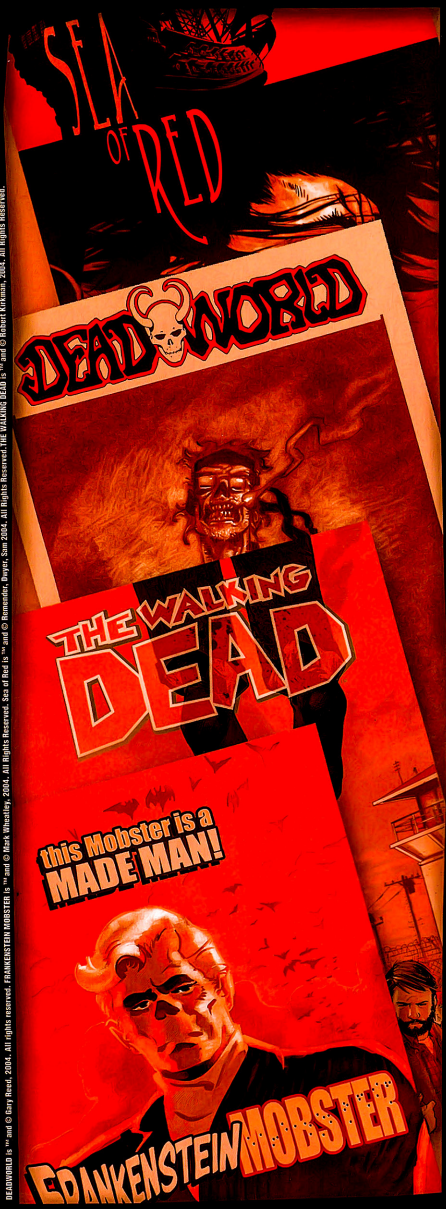

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VAMPIRELLA MAGAZINE #10

COVER CREDITS:
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Marv from Frank Miller's *Sin City*

VAMPED

ART BY LIAM SHARP

I can't begin to tell you how excited I am about this issue! This one's got it all! Check out our exclusive interview with the legendary Frank Miller: he touches on everything from co-directing the film adaptation of *Sin City* to the secret Batman project he hasn't even told DC Comics about yet! Warren Ellis chats with us about what must be his millionth new project for the year: *Desolation Jones*. Keep 'em coming, Warren. Just don't wear yourself out!!! From the best of comics past to one of the brightest lights in its future: budding superstar artist Jason Alexander talks up his latest project, *Damn Nation*. Now for a little fun, we decided to send one of our reporters to the dark hart of New York City: Troma Studios, proud producers of the infamous *Toxic Avenger* films! We asked ourselves if poor Chris Lamb could survive being a slave — er, intern at Troma for a day and does he have a story to tell! That's all right, Chris. I'm here for you if you need me.

And now for the best part of the magazine: ME! Liam Sharp shows you the passion locked within frozen hearts in "Winter's Rose." Stellar scribe Dan Jolley and hot newcomer Jeff Zornow show you what happens when someone interrupts my vacation in the hilarious "Day at the Beach."

So, sit back, relax and let yourself fall comfortably into my warm embrace.

Vampirella

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SCARLET LETTERS

CALLS IN THE DARKNESS

Dear Scarlet Letters,
Thanks a million for the Batton Lash Vampirella story in *#9*. Suddenly, it was 1975 again and I was fifteen years young. Pendragon, the old act, blood substitute serum, the trench-coat, bats!!! And best of all, a fun, intelligent story with no gratuitous violence. Lash is clearly an old-time fan, given how well he nailed both art and story. His Vampi was pure Gonzalez (no mean feat) and his writing was light-hearted, believable and old-school. My great hope now is that other fans will see the appeal of the realistic, character-driven Vampi of my youth, and we'll see more and more stories like this in issues to come.
R. L Vaughan
The Woodlands, TX

Batton certainly appreciates the kind words! You'll definitely be seeing more character driven horror stories in the future, just the way you guys want them!

Dear Vampirella,
As a long time Vampi fan, I've always enjoyed both the eye-popping artwork and the top-notch writing in both the Warren and Harris incarnations. I'm glad to see *Vampirella Magazine* continuing those traditions, though I'd like to see more comic content and perhaps a color section every now and then. I've also enjoyed the crossovers. Any plans for another Vampirella/Lady Death matchup? I really enjoyed those issues, particularly the stunning artwork by Mike Deodato, Jr. I'd love to see Deodato depict the delicious daughter of Drakulon and the delectable Diva of Death destroying dirt-bags and demons as a different "dynamic duo." Sorry... got bitten by the alliteration virus! Keep up the good work!
Jeff Warshaw
Sarasota, Florida

You never know when the two will tussle again! (The alliteration virus got us, too!)

Dear Vampirella,
Vampirella #9 just goes to show that Harris is living up to the image that Warren created for Vampirella all those decades ago... The addition of Pendragon in the first tale was great! Kudos to the writer and artist. The story brought back great nostalgic feelings, guess I'd better buy more of your Warren reprints! The *Sword of Dracula* story was a great read too, the artwork being in the dark and gritty style that I so like... I've been buying Vampirella from the start of the Harris run, and you're doing her proud. Thanks for keeping Vampi alive (or undead, so to speak)!
Batglynn
from Vampirella.com message boards

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! DROP US A LINE ANY WAY YOU CAN!

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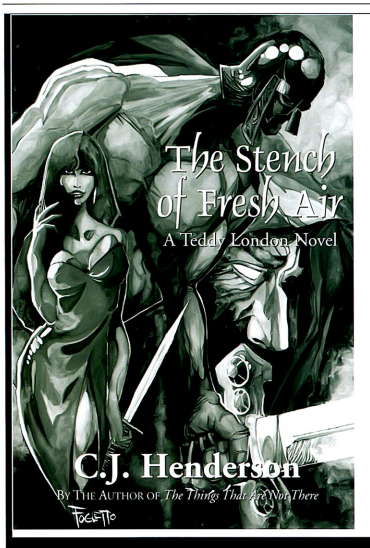

"The consistently enjoyable C.J. Henderson delivers again ..."
Cemetery Dance

Private Detective Teddy London, battered almost unto death by forces from beyond, discovers on his first day out of his recovery bed that while he's been incapacitated, a coven of vampires has set forces in motion so that they might come forth from the shadows and begin their march for world domination. Worse yet, London learns that he may have more in common with such forces than he thinks.

Armed with only a .38 named Betty and a blade named Veronica, Teddy London gathers those few souls capable of weathering the terror ahead. In this second adventure, London and those who stand with him face both power and temptations unimaginable. It is a conflict they will not all survive.

Praise for Previous Works by C.J. Henderson

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"A fascinating mixture of Philip Marlowe and Carl Kolchak ..." New York Resident
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NEWSBITES

SUCCULENT MEDIA MORSELS

TOY FAIR 2005 REPORT: A GOOD YEAR FOR HORROR

At **New York's International Toy Fair**, the world's major toy producers previewed their 2005 offerings.

NECA presented not just one but two *Sin City* series, the first appearing as the movie hits the screens in April, the second appearing late summer. There's also their Cult Classics series debuting in May, which features some of the icons of classic and modern horror films.

This Halloween, SOTA unleashes the Nightmares of Lovecraft figures. Look forward to seeing Cthulhu, Shoguth and Pickman's Model sitting on your shelves next to the books they sprang from.

Sideshow Collectibles showed off their burgeoning horror toy offerings. A new Jason Voorhees figure based on *Friday the 13th, Part 7* drops later this year. Sporting rotten flesh under every single rip and tear in its meticulously woven clothing, this figure was one of the most impressive on display at the show. Not forgetting the classics, Sideshow's also continuing to produce 1/4 scale figures based on the biggest stars from horror film's golden age. Led by a Boris Karloff as Frankenstein figure, the line will also feature the additions of Max Schrek as Count Orlok from *Nosferatu* and Lon Chaney as the Wolf Man.

(Left) NECA's Fred the Bunny and Marv 18-inch figures and Sideshow's Frankenstein stole the show. SOTA's Cthulhu (top) and R.J. MacReady/The Thing set (below) also impressed.

MARV, FRANK THE BUNNY FIGURE: COURTESY NECA; FRANKENSTEIN: COURTESY SIDESHOW COLLECTIBLES; R.J. MACREADY/THE THING AND CTHULHU FIGURES: COURTESY SOTA TOYS.

DEAD AGAIN! SAM RAIMI TALKS *EVIL DEAD 4*

The prayers of millions have been answered: **Sam Raimi**, father of the now classic *Evil Dead* movies confirmed to Bloody-Disgusting.com that he's looking to do a fourth installment. Unlike previously rumored, the movie will not be another remake of the first film, but an entirely new story also starring Bruce Campbell. He told the site: "This is the project I really want to make. The remake can belong to someone else, but part 4 will be a continuation of the original."

In other interviews with ComingSoon.net, Raimi said he's waiting for a young director with a fresh vision to remake *Evil Dead*. "The goal of this director should be to terrify the audience in a very intense and merciless way," he told the site. Bruce Campbell has insisted though it not include any character named Ash. (Additional reporting from DarkHorizons.com)

THE MIDNIGHT HOUR

Midnight Show is leaving Moonstone Books and publishing the new horror series ***Grave Grrrls*** on their own. In a statement, Scott Licina and Ken Wolak of Midnight commented, "Our ideas of production, promotion and style are more in league with publishers like Image and the former Chaos! Comics, and these differences of opinions were not beneficial to either us or Moonstone." The two went on to say, "We both have a deep respect for Moonstone owner Joe Gentile and want people to know that this is an amicable dissolution. Both Joe and ourselves went into this with the best intentions, but unfortunately it just didn't work out. We also want Joe to know how much we appreciate all his help and friendship." The first issue of *Grrrls* is available now with the second issue dropping May 25th. The third, with the pictured Joseph Linsner cover, arrives in stores July 27th.

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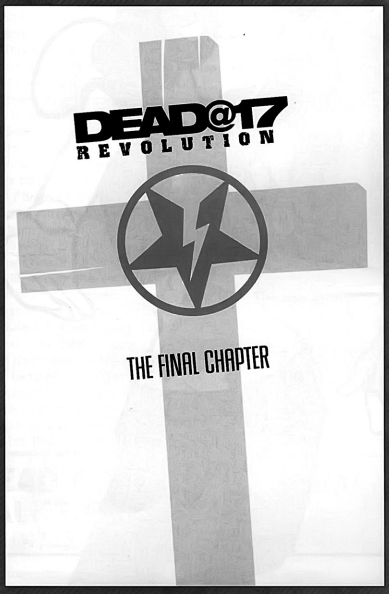

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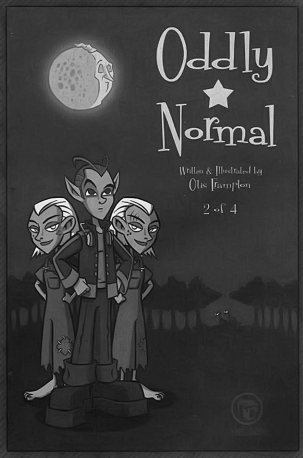

ODDLY NORMAL 02

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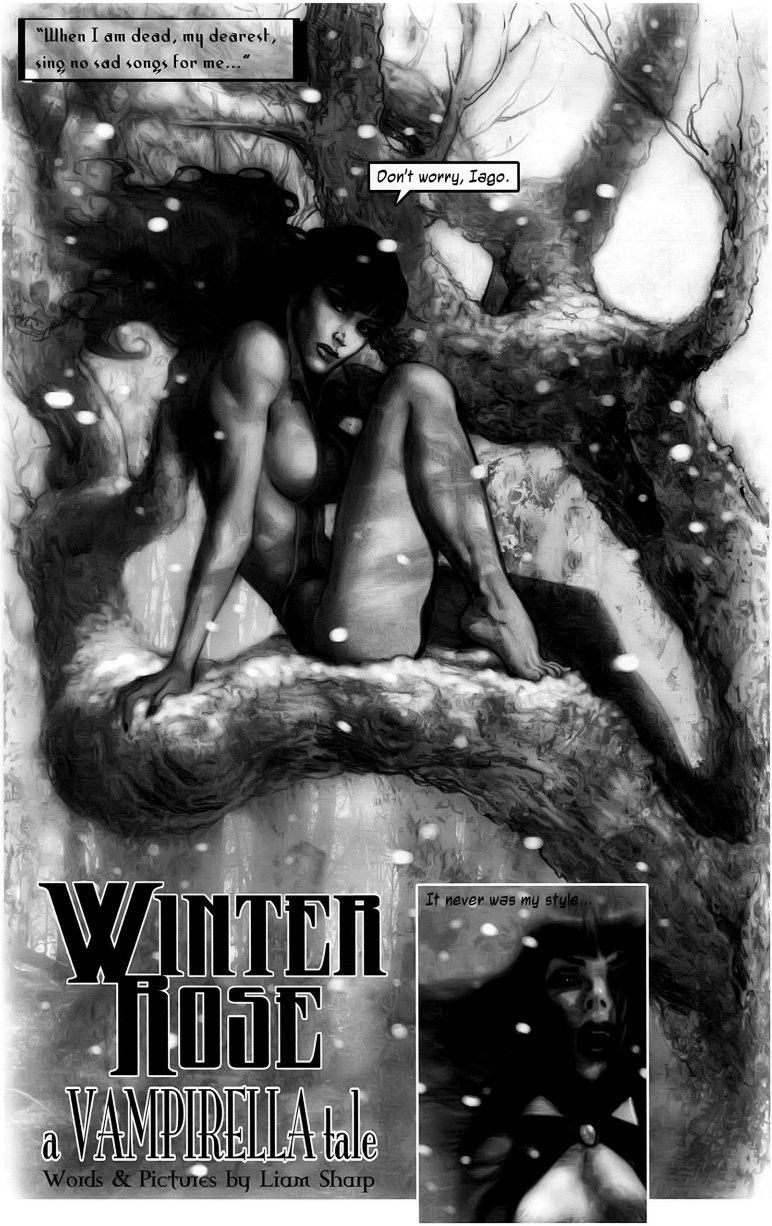
"When I am dead, my dearest, sing no sad songs for me..."
Don't worry, Iago.
WINTER ROSE
a VAMPIRELLA tale
Words & Pictures by Liam Sharp
It never was my style...

Vampirella...
Like BLOOD on the thorn of a WINTER ROSE...
Uhuf huf...
Bitter, and fragrant...
Ahu... ah...
Christ...
And quite beautiful...
Will you NEVER give up, Iago?
NEVER!
Not until...
YOU ARE MINE!!!

Poor boy...
You'll never possess me, Iago.
Nobody ever could.
But don't trouble yourself now.
After all...
I could always make you...
MINE!!!
P... Please...
Whuf huf... no...

MARIANNA!!!
Where are you child...
You...
You KNOW, don't you?
I SEE it... in your eyes...
You KNOW what I AM!
You can't stay here.
It's not safe, for either of us...
YOU!
You're not HUMAN either...
Tell me it isn't so!
Uh huh... HURRRRrr...
Uh! Ah!
ARGH...God!
N... No..
I should have guessed sooner...

VAMPIRELLAAAAAA!!
COME!
Be with me...
You and I...
WE could be KING and QUEEN...

...WE could be KING and QUEEN of the DAMNED! DEATH would have no dominion over US! Vampirella... please, don't... don't turn me away...
You're a FOOL Iago. Kingdoms can be prisons. Even MONARCHS have their masters...
But... My love...
Listen well:
Be gone from here.
Never come back.
Put a THOUSAND MILES between us.
And leave NOT A TRACE of your passing...
It's too dangerous, this world, for such as us...
If we remained together they would find us out, and just as surely they would KILL us.
Marianna... Oh god... Oh no...
"When I am DEAD, my dearest, sing no sad songs for me..."

Why? Why did you come back? You had ESCAPED... I could have let you LIVE...
I HAD TO COME BACK, MY BLOODIED ROSE, FOR LOVE...
OF YOU...
LOVE you say!!??
I asked, I BEGGED you to LEAVE NOT A TRACE of your passing... and yet you killed... you KILLED a child...
AS YOU SEE, I AM THAT I AM BELOVED...
WHEN THE MOON WANTS HER FILL... I'M LITTLE MORE THAN A SLAVE...

Like BLOOD on the THORN of a winter rose...
Bitter...
And fragrant...
And quite beautiful...
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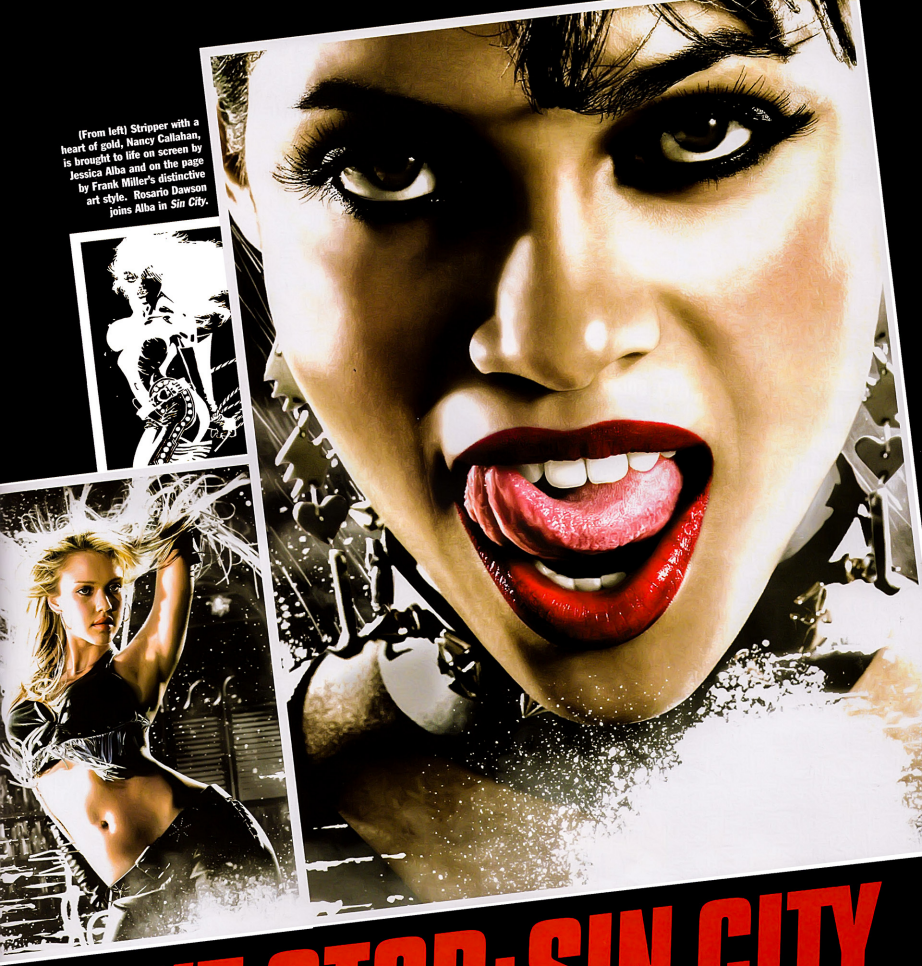


(From left) Stripper with a heart of gold, Nancy Callahan, is brought to life on screen by Jessica Alba and on the page by Frank Miller's distinctive art style. Rosario Dawson joins Alba in *Sin City*.

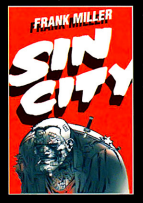
NEXT STOP: SIN CITY

From the stars, to the clothes to the legendary mind it all sprang from, everything you need to know and more on the coolest comic book adaptation of the year!

MILLER TIME

FRANK MILLER, the man who built Sin City, speaks on bringing his vision to the big screen, directing Bruce Willis and his secret Batman project. BY ZENA TSARFIN

IN Robert Rodriguez's *Sin City* adaptation, despite a myriad of Hollywood A-listers, there's only one name on the marquee that really matters: that of its creator *and* budding co-director, Frank Miller. In an unprecedented measure to guarantee accuracy for his film—or at the very least, to indulge in a raging fanboy fantasy—the *Desperado* director agreed to share top billing with the comic book legend. Though the collaboration might go down as the most faithful comic-based movie ever made, it still took some convincing for the man behind the acclaimed Dark Horse series to cosign.

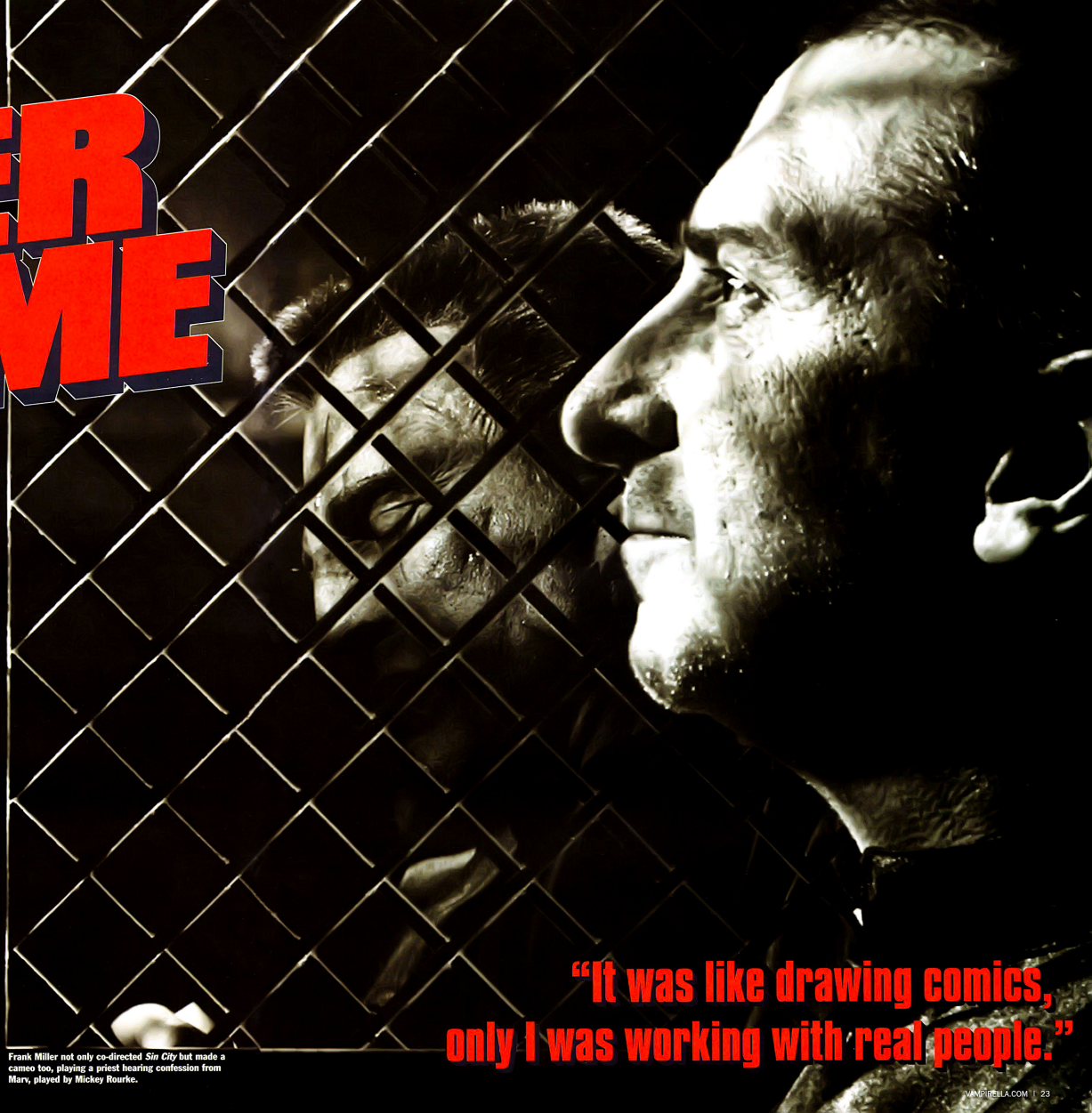


"I was allergic to the idea of a *Sin City* movie," Miller begins. He recalls the effort Rodriguez made to sway him. "One day Robert calls me up and says, 'How about I fly you down to Austin and we do a test? We'll shoot a scene and if you don't like it, we won't do the movie. But if you like it, we will.' I thought, they're gonna blow it, they're going to give it a happy ending… they're just going to trash the thing because it's Hollywood. He just said, 'It's not Hollywood, it's Austin.'

"Robert flew me down still telling me it was a test," Miller continues, suddenly sounding more like a proud dad than an overprotective author. "I show up, and there's Josh Hartnett. Test, my ass! Who hires Josh Hartnett for a test? About six hours into the shoot, all doubt fled. The hook was in my mouth." Miller quickly discovered a kindred spirit in the Texan director known for his hands-on involvement on his projects. "Robert and I immediately established a connection that hasn't waned at all," he says. "He is in movies like I am in comics. I control every facet of my comic books, but he controls every facet of his movies. As co-director, he gave me tremendous control over the content and the angles, but we negotiated every step of the way."

It seemed natural for Miller, the prolific 48-year-old creator behind such groundbreaking tomes like *Ronin*, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, monumental *Daredevil* and *Elektra* runs, and of course, a slew of *Sin City* episodes, to partner up with Rodriguez. The director has produced, written, and even composed scores for work that ranges from the child-friendly *Spy Kids* adventures to the giddily violent *El Mariachi* yarn that begot *Once Upon A Time in Mexico*. "I wanted his guidance because I was a novice director," said Miller of the trade-off. "He wanted my overall vision." The only real friction they faced seeped in externally when the Director's Guild informed the duo they would not be able to share credit. "Robert and I sat down in his office and he told me there was a problem with the Director's Guild over the co-credit. He offered me sole credit—which I hadn't refused because it was just a dare. He just shrugged his shoulders and said, 'Well, then I'm quitting the Guild.' What a mensch, huh? I was most impressed."

Once their rôles were firmly established, the challenge still remained to translate three separate yet intersecting tales—*Sin City*, *That Yellow Bastard* and



"It was like drawing comics, only I was working with real people."

Frank Miller not only co-directed *Sin City* but made a cameo too, playing a priest hearing confession from Marv, played by Mickey Rourke.

"I thought… they're just going to trash the thing because it's Hollywood. [Rodriguez] just said, 'It's not Hollywood, it's Austin.'"

Rodriguez used Miller's art to guide the movie's shots.

The Big Fat Kill—into a cohesive motion picture. Though it's less than half the total threads Miller set in the crime-ridden metropolis since the early '90s, the movie still introduces a Spillane-influenced tapestry of violent residents. For a first-time director, Miller couldn't have asked for a better cast. There's reluctant bad boy Dwight McCarthy, played by the freshly minted Golden Globe winner Clive Owen. Underdog, hard-boiled cop John Hartigan is played by million-dollar leading man Bruce Willis. Doe-eyed Nancy Callahan, a stripper with a heart of gold, is brought to life by Jessica Alba. Elijah Wood plays psychopathic Kevin. It girls Rosario Dawson, Devin Aoki and Brittany Murphy appear as the cut-throat, new wave hookers of Old Town. Jaime King is the mysterious Goldie. And most aptly, a prosthetics-assisted Mickey Rourke is the hulking, redemption-seeking antihero Marv. "The characters repeat throughout and it will segue from one to the other without seams," he explains. "It's almost like you're walking through a city and everything that's going on is very intense."

Early leaks from the set reported that Rodriguez was cutting out and photocopying pages from the comic to guide shots.

"Cut out pages? He actually had an *animatic* camera that projected the pages up on a monitor so they could match the image exactly," Miller confirms. "Nobody's ever been as faithful to a comic book as [he] is." The "test" shoot starring Hartnett and Marley Shelton debuted to much hoopla at the 2004 San Diego Comic Con. It was a far cry from the insecurities Miller experienced while on the Austin set.

"The morning that Bruce Willis showed up, I was petrified," he admits. It's hard to imagine the revered 30-year comic veteran could be intimidated. After all, anyone who has encountered the pensive-looking scribe with close-cropped hair and deep, well-earned bags under his eyes could easily suffer from the same anxiety. "*This is Bruce Willis!*" he repeats, with a tinge of pride and excitement. "I thought, I'm a first-time director, he'll mop the floor with me. I assumed he'd be some kind of prima donna. He shows up and goes, 'Hey man, about the script…' I was officially a mop. Then [Willis] goes, 'I just want to put some of the stuff from the book back in.' He was a dream to work with."

It's hard to tell from his obvious excitement that *Sin City* isn't Miller's first foray in movies. Having served as screenwriter for two *Robocop* sequels, he learned first-hand what it's like to be cut out of the creative process. "When you're a screenwriter and you don't have the power of a director or a producer, you're like a fire hydrant with a whole line of dogs around the block—you're completely at their mercy. [On *Sin City*] I had a wonderful time. It was like drawing comics, only I was working with real people. The same principles apply to film as they do to comics, it's been mystified wrongly—the two relate much more intimately than I thought. I also discovered that I really love working with actors, and that actors are intensely creative, intelligent people."

But don't look for Frank to forego his home in Manhattan for sunny Los Angeles just yet. "The experience made me want to do comics that are less like movies," he reflects. "Just to use the cartooniness of comics, the boldness and the abruptness—the things that if real people did them would be too horrific or too ridiculous to believe… Right now I'm doing a comic that's Batman versus Al- Qaeda, for obvious reasons. I'm about 120 pages into it and I haven't even made arrangements with the publishers, I'm just doing it. And if they don't like it, I'll take his ears off and call it something else—but I think they'll like it." More official is his upcoming writing gig for *All-Star Batman and Robin*, which will be illustrated by heavy-hitter Jim Lee. And, of course, "I've already told them if they want a *Sin City 2*, I'm on."

SIN-ISTER THREADS

Sin City **costume designer Nina Proctor talks up trenchcoats, fishnet stockings and Jessica Alba's custom-made bra.**

IT started with an email. Robert Rodriguez let his long time costume designer, Nina Proctor, know he needed a suit and a red dress for something he was shooting in Austin. Josh Hartnett wore the suit, Marley Shelton the dress. Together they enacted the short scene that eventually convinced Frank Miller to give Rodriguez the go-ahead to make *Sin City*. And that was only the beginning.

How did you approach adapting Miller's designs into your costumes?

I took Frank Miller's books and just really studied what he had drawn to bring it to life. I didn't try to change that much.

Could you describe the unique trenchcoats of the actors?

One was an Italian wool that looked like leather. It was a particular weave so it was almost paper thin. If they were jumping off a roof or a balcony, the coat would almost trail behind—it was cape-like!

Could you talk about your experiences with the actresses?

Rosario [Dawson] wore fishnets and leather straps, but it was all very custom fit to her body. She was totally psyched about it. When I first met with her she had hair down to her waist. She put the costume on and just got so excited. The next time I saw her she had chopped it all off and just became Gayle. She rocked!

Jessica Alba really brought her costume to life. It was leather chaps and a custom made bra. She was also supposed to be a dancer on stage so they were all working pieces.

The way Frank portrayed the women, they were all so strong, powerful. They weren't going to take crap from anyone. Every woman was excited to do this project and we just wanted to do it right.

How closely did you work with Frank Miller?

He just loved the whole process. These were his babies so I definitely wanted him to feel he was part of the process, but ultimately they trusted me to do my job.

How close a hand did Robert Rodriguez have in your work?

He pays attention to close details. Because it's digital, you can pick up small details so much easier, so I run things like that by him for approval before I custom build something.

This entire group of people, the Rodriguez team, is such an amazing group of people. Robert and his wife, Elizabeth, have just created an atmosphere down here that's more like a family. Robert blows our mind on every movie. There's no set, there's just a green screen and props so we never know what Robert is shooting. We're always surprised when we go to the theatre to see it: "When did we shoot this?"

He really is a Renaissance Man. If I had my choice I'd never work for anyone else.

What will people love about *Sin City*?

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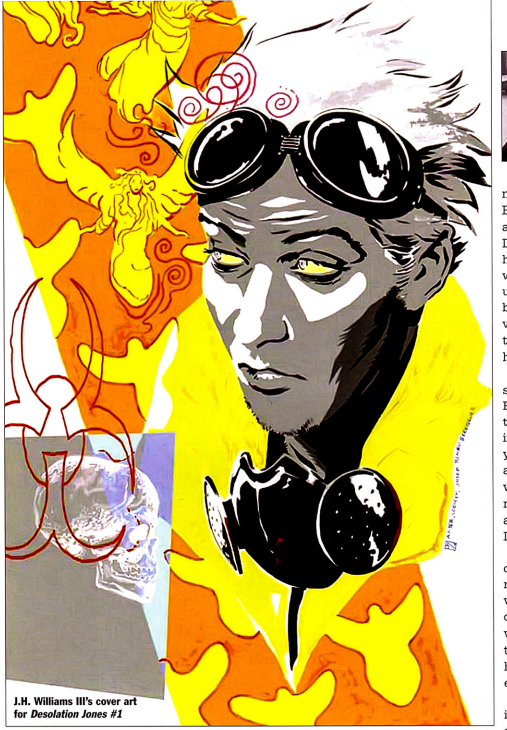


J.H. Williams III's cover art for *Desolation Jones #1*

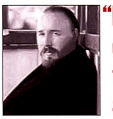
I MUST BE BLOODY MAD

Prolific comics scribe **WARREN ELLIS** pens his next epic series, ***DESOLATION JONES.***

BY SABRINA PEYTON

As comic books increasingly have to compete against other media, it is rare indeed to find a writer capable of holding readers' attentions on just about everything he writes and to get them coming back for more. But be careful with him, he's fragile. "I could keel over at any second," Warren Ellis laments.

Ellis is one of those writers, responsible already for *Transmetropolitan* and *Planetary*, while also having written *Hellblazer* and *Vampirella* among others. He is loved and hated by many, but they still spend their hard earned cash paying for Ellis to spend the day writing (most likely in the pub on some electronic gadget). His newest creation is *Desolation Jones* published by Wildstorm Comics, which you might find is reminiscent of his previous work.



"Fill your head with enough crap, and let it fester for long enough, and it'll turn into a story..."

Michael Jones, an alcoholic British secret agent no longer fit for service ("Put another way: James Bond never urinated on himself."), has agreed to be an experimental patient for something called the Desolation Test. The fallout of the Test leaves Jones hating sleep because of his dreams. For all those who knew him, he is dead. He's out of pills and unable to stop the visions; there is nowhere to go but up. Moving to Los Angeles and working as a private investigator, his sole focus is to make sure all the broken people in the darkest areas of L.A. do not have to suffer any more.

How does he approach starting another long term series? "With horror, mostly. I must be bloody mad. But sometimes you find that you have more than one thing to say with a story idea that can't be contained in a miniserial or graphic novel. And, a couple of years after *Transmet*, I felt I'd built up to that point again; that I had things to say about the modern world, about the wreckage of the intelligence business, about the aftermaths of living strange lives, and the psychopathologies of existing in cities like L.A. that are just blueprints for human alienation.

"There's a town in Texas which is a retirement community for ex-intelligence people. There was a news story a few years ago about an ex-spy who went crazy. Spending time in L.A. Taking a couple of ideas out of an old pitch from the nineties that went nowhere. Rediscovering some old notes on the CIA drug trials of the fifties and sixties. Fill your head with enough crap, and let it fester for long enough, and it'll turn into a story..."

"I see *Jones* as being a few years long with a definite end point. At this point, obviously, anything can change. But, right now, I feel I can see how it ends. I don't like 'never-ending' comics serials. Everything should have an end."

The initial pitch described the book as "Stanley Kubrick meets Raymond Chandler." "Chandler, yes. Once I'd decided to set the book in Los Angeles, Chandler became the obvious touchstone, and I'm lifting structures from Chandler and elsewhere—both to give the books a certain shape, and to hopefully suggest that in some ways life in L.A. is timeless. That history repeats itself, and that the people in the strata of society I'm talking about are trapped in these old cycles, just as the ex-intel community of L.A. is trapped within the city boundaries. Jones, bless 'im, isn't quite Philip Marlowe. He's too much of a wreck for that. But he tries. Even when he's given the job of tracking down Hitler's home-made porno movies."

Joining Ellis is artist J.H. Williams III, best known for his work on *Promethea* and currently doing covers for *JSA*. Initially the series was to be drawn by rotating artists but that changed with the arrival of Willams. "J.H. wanted to draw them all, so I signed him on to the book as co-creator and he'll be illustrating the entire run."

After a few glitches in getting books out on schedule, it seems that Ellis is back on track producing a mass of work across genres and different companies. Any reason behind this or are we just seeing work because of happy coincidence? "What's been released lately is stuff that I started back in 2003, and it's all coming out in a lump." Pretty good for someone who's about to "keel over." Let's hope for long life for both Ellis and his latest flawed central character.

ART BY J.H. WILLIAMS III; PHOTO FROM WARRENELLIS.COM

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TROMA-TIZED

We sent a reporter to intern for a day at Troma Studios. He barely survived, left muttering something about "The Basement...The Dark Place."

BY CHRIS LAMB

When I arrive at Troma Studios in the heart—or perhaps the gnarled, misplaced spleen—of Hell's Kitchen, art director Kevin Michaels is waiting for me. He lays down the law. Here at Troma, there are three rules for interns. You check your name at the door, learning to jump when the intercom barks "INTERN!" You get used to doing three things at once and never, ever, saying no.

And you spend most of your time in the basement. (No, not yet. I'm not ready to talk about the dark place.) Kevin hands me over to Gabriel Abatangelo. At first glance, Gabe doesn't appear to be the sort of person who would know how many little people fit in a parrot cage. There's Megacon in Florida to get ready for, and DVD's that need boxing. As intern, it's my job to box them, and tape them up, and do anything else that might come up.

For now, let's talk about the Troma library. You might have an idea of the standards: *The Toxic Avenger* library, *Sgt. Kabukiman, NYPD*, *Terror Firma* and *Surf Nazis Must Die*. But you know nothing. The Troma catalog boasts over three hundred titles, with at least another hundred reissued classics under the Roan Group banner, including the first starring roles of Kevin Costner, Dustin Hoffman and Robert DeNiro. They are almost all each represented by a dozen or so copies in something not unlike alphabetical order. We dig through them, filling box after box with the damn things.

After a while, one of the girls from the office comes to the storage room seeking a free intern. There are only two of us about today, me and Greg, who's on a "Special Project for Lloyd" and can't be pulled. So I go from packing DVDs to "type up the audio for the trailer of *Toxic Avenger IV: A Tale Of Two Toxies*." Have keyboard and headphones, will, uh, transcribe.

The gist of the flick is Toxie vs. Evil Toxie—you can tell the evil one because he has hair. Toxie fights off a team of super-heroes hunting him down for crimes his doppelganger commits. Crimes like ripping the arms off the chief of police and throwing little girls at brick walls like they are water balloons. Oh, yeah, and Toxie's girl gets pregnant with twins, and he discovers later each child has a different father. This leads to what I'm pretty sure is the only in utereo fight scene in film history, as brother fights brother to the death. Let the kids have Keanu and Elrond duking it out Dragon Ball Z style. *Toxie IV* gives us THUNDERWOMB! Two fetuses enter, one fetus leaves!

In fact, if there's a downside to typing up the subtitle text for a Troma trailer, it's that there's only so many ways of saying

ALL PHOTOS BY CHRIS LAMB; ART COURTESY TROMA STUDIOS

"There's a reason I call my mom every day around this time to tell her I love her...right?"
– Last words before entering the "dark place"

EVERYBODY SCREAMS AND STUFF GOES BLEWY. But it's a labor of love and, despite such inhuman work conditions, I soldier on.

And then there is the basement. Sometimes, I dream I'm still there.

In the never-ending flood of orders from on high, there is one constant: Clean the basement. Straighten up the basement. They tell me it's not that hard. It's not that bad. Suck it up, change your shorts and deal. So after lunch and a "research viewing" of *Blood-Sucking Freaks*, we prepare for the inevitable. I ask Gabe if we should take a broom or something, and he just shakes his head. "Won't do any good," he sighs. "There's a reason I call my mom every day around this time to tell her I love her. Just in case, right?" I mumble in agreement and down we go.

The first things you see are boxes. Towers of boxes, stacked taller than you and filling the basement. Props lie strewn around everywhere, masks and hands and burned feet. There's zombified corpses, minus their heads and clothed in flowery blouses. Boxes labeled "Toxic Crusaders Cells" or "*Nuke 'Em High* posters" are stuffed away like that warehouse at the end of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. Not that you can see very far. Light in the basement seems to get lost in the winding maze of Troma's checkered past, so it's never quite bright enough to feel safe. There's a sense of age there, of nameless evil that watches from the cold eyes of a *Sucker: The Vampire* poster. And there's the smell, first of rat poison, then of dead rats. So you push through, shuffling boxes or gathering up this lot of severed hands to take back upstairs. You try not to think of zombie rodents chewing off everything below your kneecaps. Instead there's a world of history around to gawk at: posters and reels from a dozen films, promotional posters and Kabukiman comics only in Spanish.

"So, when do I get to meet Lloyd Kaufman?" I ask Gabe. "And what do they keep back there, in that room past the boiler?" Gabe is grinning, no, giggling like a schoolgirl who's eaten her body weight in Mentos. "Oh, Lloyd's very excited to meet you. He said for you to wait down here, and he'll introduce you personally to his prized collection, the cream of the Troma crop." I ask what he collects. "Oh, bits of this and that."

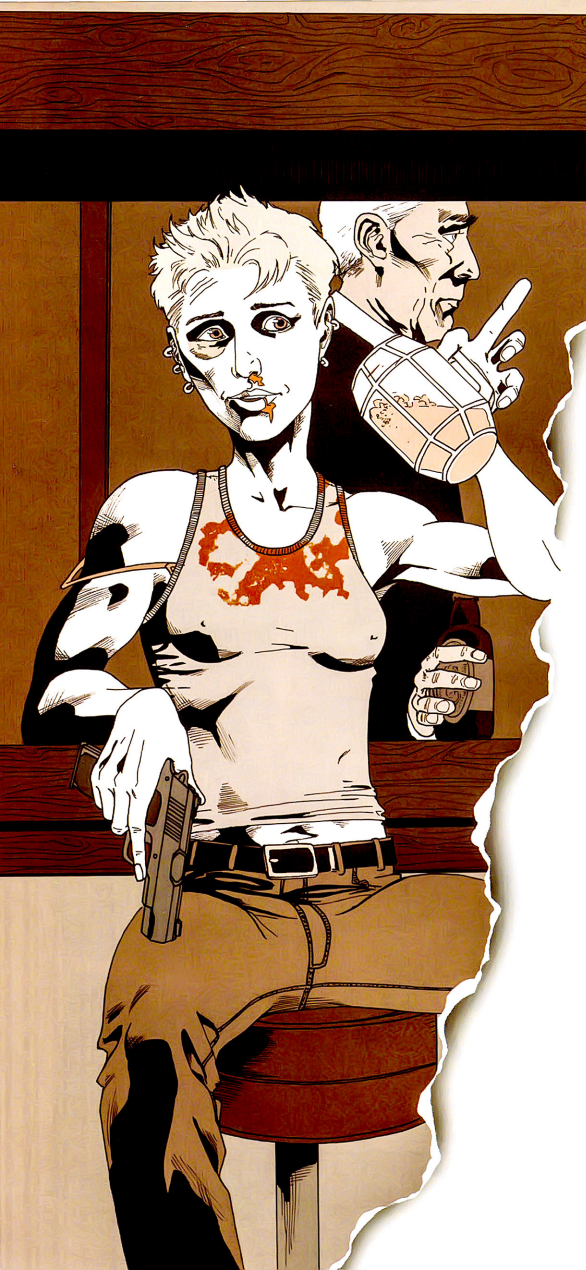
I'm to wait in the back room, "where the good stuff is," he says. I pick my way through the stacks of film cells and old props, ever under the hollow gaze of rotting Sgt. Kabukiman masks. Gabe follows close behind, herding me through the dark till we reach the black door. "The light switch is out here. Step inside and I'll flick 'em on."

If I'd been to New Mexico, if I'd seen the midgets in their cages and what he'd done with the armadillos, I would have known better. The door locks behind me, the lights come on, and I'm introduced to the thirteen wives of Lloyd Kaufman, founder of Troma studios and skilled vivisectionist. From the precision of the cuts and the way they're organized, each piece in a neatly labeled laundry basket, it was clear he had loved them very much.

From the shadows I hear the sound of a knife sharpening and footsteps coming towards me. "Mr. Kaufman, is that you?" I ask. No answer. "Does this mean you won't be keeping me on full time?"

Suddenly he's there in front of me, the light glinting off his favorite butcher's knife, Lil' Lloyd. "I'm sorry, son," he says, "but times are tough, and we have to make some cuts."

The Toxic Avenger 21st Anniversary Edition is now available. Visit troma.com for gory surprises including hacked-up photos of Chris Lamb. The Troma Team likes the taste of Lamb!



"down these mean streets a girl must go...."

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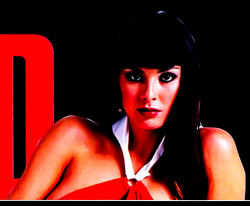
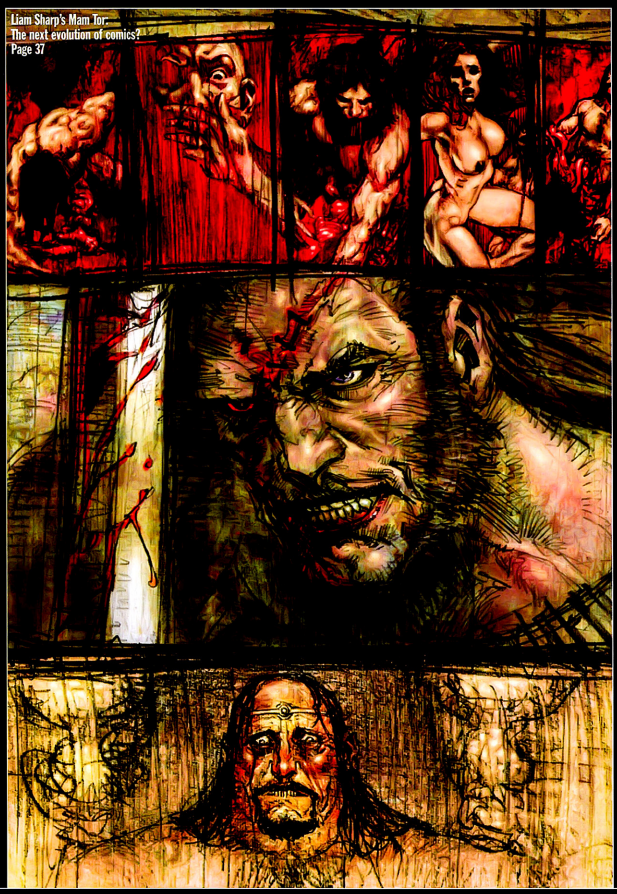


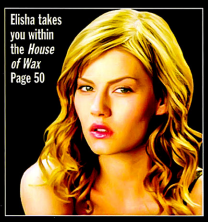
WHATEVER GETS YOU THROUGH THE NIGHT

Let them bleed! Open the door to NEW BLOOD where we you can find your type, sit back and enjoy the best, the brightest and even the questionable in comics, books, movies, toys and chicks. They say there's something for everyone; here's the place to find it.



Liam Sharp's Mam Tor
The next evolution of comics?
Page 37

ELISHA CUTHBERT PHOTO COURTESY WARNER BORS.; ART BY (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) LIAM SHARP, MAJO, JASON ALEXANDER



Elisha takes you within the *House of Wax*
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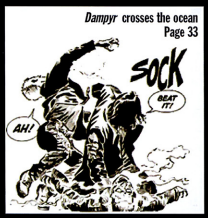

Dampyr crosses the ocean
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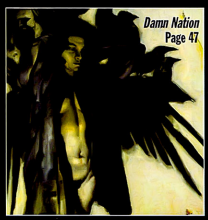

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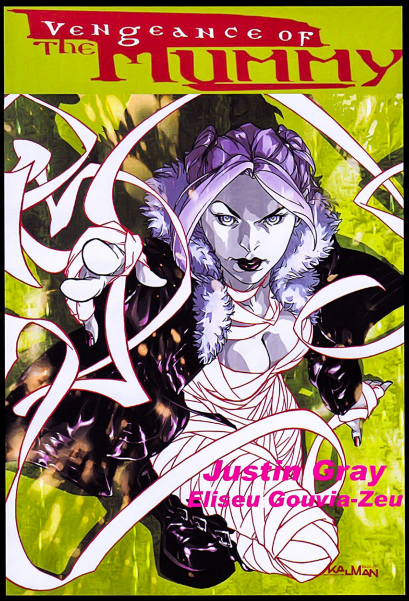

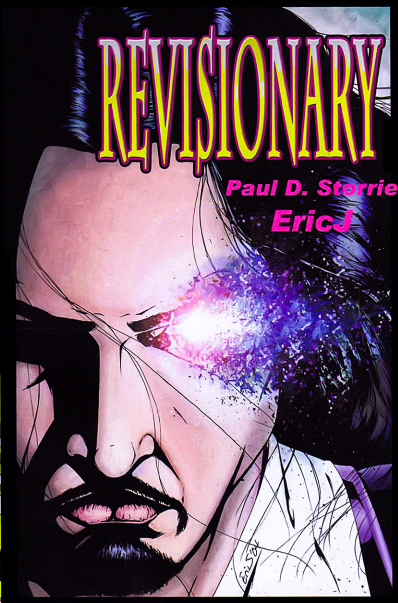

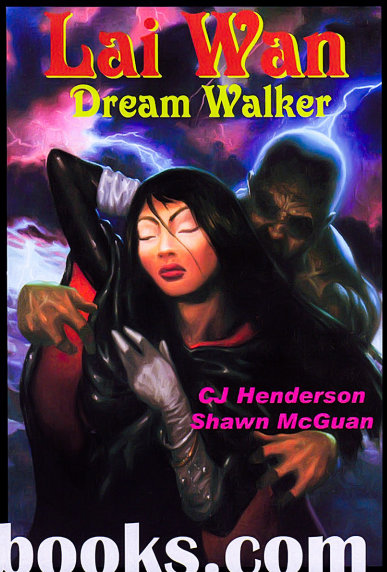

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body...

mind...

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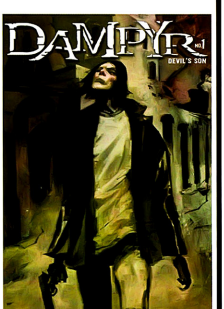
COMICS

UNLIKELY HERO

Europe's best kept secret arrives

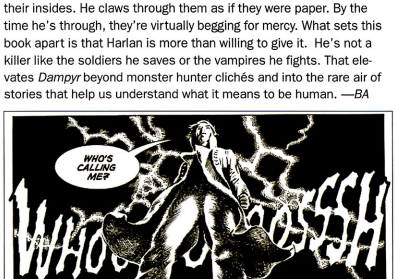
DAMPYR

Writers: Mauro Boselli & Maurizio Colombo
Artist: Majo
IDW Publishing
(www.idwpublishing.com)



IDW Publishing has brought the long running European vampire hunter epic *Dampyr* to these shores. Brought to life with the expressive linework of Majo, *Dampyr* infuses a long needed spin into the genre.

Harlan Draka suckers peasants into believing he can rid their towns of evil spirits. When a terrified group of soldiers hears about him, they bring him to their camp, already devastated by what one survivor calls "the devil." Draka tries to convince them he's just a con man, his evil spirits nothing but tall tales. But when vampires actually do attack, Harlan discovers that his powers are too horrifically real: his blood burns their skin like acid and boils their insides. He claws through them as if they were paper. By the time he's through, they're virtually begging for mercy. What sets this book apart is that Harlan is more than willing to give it. He's not a killer like the soldiers he saves or the vampires he fights. That elevates *Dampyr* beyond monster hunter clichés and into the rare air of stories that help us understand what it means to be human. —*BA*



MISTER MONSTER: WORLDS WAR TWO

Writer: Michael T. Gilbert
Artists: Gilbert & George Freeman
Atomeka Press
(www.atomekapress.com)

The Nazi Martian invasion of 1969 devastated the planet. Overnight, gruesome, three-eyed aliens goose-stepped across the earth, once again enslaving humans under the swastika. Mankind was helpless under the relentless onslaught of the Fourth Reich! Who could stop them? Humanity's last hope: Doc Stearn, Mr. Monster! What? You never heard of Worlds War Two??? You never heard of the larger-than-life exploits of the greatest hero the world has known? This graphic novel demonstrates why creators from Alan Moore to Mike Mignola have taken the bombastic hero out for a spin. Not afraid to get his hands dirty, or in this case very, very gooey, Stearn leaves the aliens a mess of splattered brain matter and wriggling spinal columns. Along the way he stumbles on an insidious plot within his government that eventually leads him to discover the terrible secret of Hitler's brain!

Gilbert's dialogue maintains the same tongue-in-cheek tone, never becoming too cheesy. At the same time the art recalls a bygone period when monsters could look so ridiculous, they're actually scary. The fine coloring of Laurie Smith and Bad A$$ becomes especially noticeable on pages that could have been too busy with gore, laser fire and the towering martians. Altogether, Gilbert and crew have crafted an over-the-top, relentlessly fun book. —*BA*

ELK'S RUN

Writer: Joshua Hale Fialkov
Artist: Noel Tuazon
Hoarse and Buggy Productions
(www.hoarseandbuggy.com)

Elk's Run is the latest from the creator of the hit indie comics anthology *Western Tales of Terror* and it keeps the standard high for Hoarse and Buggy Productions. John Kohler lives in the sleepy secluded town of Elk's Ridge, West Virginia which is connected to the outside world by only a tunnel under a mountain. He witnesses the death of a friend and an act of murder perpetrated by his father. Joshua Hale Fialkov brings us a powerful coming of age tale with a skillful blending of suspense and horror elements. Noel Tuazon's pencils have a wonderfully classic feel that makes it seem as if you're watching a scene from *Stand By Me*. From the storytelling and art you can easily tell that Joshua Hale Fialkov and Noel Tuazon's collaboration on this project is the work of true professionals. *Elk's Run* is a shining example of what a great comic book, indie or otherwise should look like. —*Daniel Kang*

BOOKS

WEREWOLF: THE FORSAKEN

White Wolf Studios
(www.white-wolf.com)

Ah...to be a werewolf. To run free under the light of the full moon. To hunt, to stalk, to rip your prey asunder. All you'd have to fear would be the silver bullets, right? If only it were that easy...

In *Werewolf: The Forsaken*, gamers can play as members of one of six tribes hated and hunted by the physical world, abandoned and shunned by the spiritual realm. Werewolves are under constant and brutal threat from blood-sucking vampires, upstart mages, and vicious pure-blooded werewolves. But, ultimately the worst threat comes from themselves, as players are forced to maintain the balance between their savage fury and the tiny vestiges of humanity they still cling to.

The character creation process allows players to create characters that aren't superheroes, but rather creatures on the brink of survival that have to fight tooth and claw just to stay alive. For first-time gamers, the mechanics and textured back story may seem a little daunting. The source book, however, offers helpful hints and quick reference guides for storytellers and players alike.

If there is a flaw, it would stem from the fact that the book is not entirely self-contained. To play *Werewolf: The Forsaken*, you need to have a copy of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. Aside from that, the authors of this game have done a fantastic job weaving mythology, film and fiction into an inspired tapestry of savage fury and horror. It is a game of desperate struggle and high stakes, because in the World of Darkness, you never know what might be lurking in the shadows. —*DG*

WOMAN

Writer: Richard Matheson
Gauntlet Press (gauntletpress.com)

To say Richard Matheson is a master of horror stories, you might as well say that fish swim. His newest novel, *Woman*, is a terrifying and fascinating prospect. A mysterious young woman shows up at the door of a radio psychologist and his TV producer-wife, and all hell breaks loose—but not in the traditional way. The discussion of sexual politics turns vicious and deadly as to the place in society or women and men. The young woman stakes her ground and her beliefs, unleashing a power on the gathered. No one's left unscathed, the characters or the reader.

Woman is almost too good to explain. It's like a response to the old ad line: "It's not nice to fool Mother Nature." Because, Mother Nature may just fool with you. —*Maureen McTigue*

THE DEAD WALK

Writers: Various
Die, Monster, Die! Books
(www.diemonsterdie.com)

For the enthusiast of the undead, Die Monster Die! brings us *The Dead Walk*, a collection of short stories exploring the mythos surrounding the zombie from every possible angle. Neal Patterson's satirical "Zombie Beach Party" is Gidget for the reanimated dead. In the neo-noir "Paradise Denied," John L. French sets up a strong (albeit occasionally heavy-handed) metaphor for discrimination in mainstream society, while simultaneously exploring the potential for moral anarchy after Judgment Day. Both of James Chambers' contributions evoke the sense of terror that has kept zombie lore a staple of the horror industry for years; they are disturbing not only for the gore and gristle therein, but for the psychological implications of a world in which we must do battle with our most primitive selves. C.J. Henderson's "The Last Best Friend" and Robert M. Price's "The Righteous Rise" provide rich historical backdrops that lend an eerie authenticity to their respective tales, though "Rise" tends to go on a bit, and navigating the Biblical plot is, at times, cumbersome.

The Dead Walk! has its weak points: the editing throughout the book is virtually nonexistent, and the stories occasionally fall back on the hackneyed Hollywood stereotype of the mindless, flesh-eating undead, while other pieces work too hard to inspire terror and instead come off as pure camp. Overall, though, this is a collection worth reading: not every story is a gem, but there are enough inspired moments to keep even the most hardened horror aficionado turning pages.
—*Jennifer Blood*

DVDS

TERROR CALLS

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Phone

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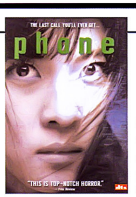
(www.tartanvideousa.com)



Just as *The Ring* movies turned the seemingly harmless act of watching a video tape into a moment of sheer terror, *Phone* transforms the ringing of your cell into a death knell. Korea's all-time top-grossing horror film has finally come across the ocean to frighten American audiences into leaving their cell phones at home.

Ji-Won, a reporter who exposed an underage sex scandal, is receiving threatening phone calls. She changes her number, only to start receiving calls consisting of otherworldly howls and screams. Fear soon redefines itself. The terror of the ringing seeps into every aspect of her life: her dreams turn to nightmares and when the child of a friend accidentally answers her phone she begins acting psychotically. Ji-Won launches an investigation to find the truth. She discovers everyone who's had her number has suffered a horrible death, some by their own hand, some by accident. *Phone's* many twist endings resolve themselves not with gore and bloodshed but with a tale of vengeance and betrayal. In the end, the real horror comes not from beyond the grave, but from within the human heart itself. —*BA*

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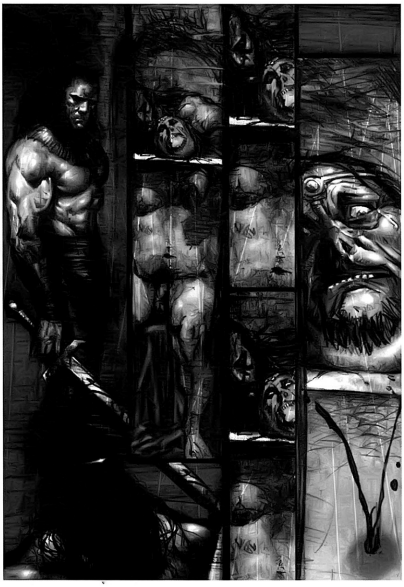
MIGHTY MAM TOR!

LIAM SHARP STARTS A COMICS REVOLUTION AND FINDS HIS LOVE FOR COMICS AGAIN IN THE PROCESS. By Maureen McTigue

Sharp's cover art for Mam Tor's *Event Horizon*



"It literally is punk rock on a page."

Liam Sharp is the last person you want to call crazy. But that doesn't stop some people. Like me. Sharp laughs it off though, "Well, I guess I must be!"

Why is the UK-based artist crazy? It's because of his new venture, Mam Tor, a creator-based publishing house. And when we say "creator-based," we mean "creator-based."

"I AM Mam Tor!" Sharp exclaims about his contributions to the imprint. "I did the shmoozing, the organizing, the promotion, the editing...pretty much everything at the start! It was my concept to give these new guys a break and myself a chance to do a little writing and the kind of art I've always wanted to have a go at. We've had to expand quickly as everything got bigger than we ever imagined, and now there are seven of us that form the hub of the company and a bunch of others we've roped in to help out."

Allowing talent like Steve Niles (*30 Days of Night*), Glenn Fabry (*Preacher*), Ashley Wood (*Lore*) to mingle with new kids like Shane McCarthy, who happens to be writing a Batman story, Kody Chamberlain and Dan Wickline brings an old-fashioned confluence to comics: comics by and for comics people. Sharp, a well-established artist who has bowled people over with his kinetic work in *Spawn*, *Possessed* and for *Heavy Metal*, recently stunned fans by showing off his range with work like his recent Vampirella story.

There's something spectacular about Mam Tor, more than just what it is, it's a bit of a revolution. As Sharp explains, "It's *ours*, not anybody else's. The creators *own* their stories. We chose them, sure, but it's their work, their characters, their chosen approach. It was done for free, so you know the work has been produced out of love of the medium, not because it's a job. It literally *is* punk rock on a page. We did it because we wanted to, and that's that. How many other companies can claim that?"

With an approachable publishing plan—three inter-related, stand-alone books a year—Mam Tor takes on pulp fiction in its own special way. "It kind of starts in the deep fantasy past with 'Fucking Savages,' written by Steve Niles. Then it moves through time to the far distant future..." Sharp says. "We have fantasy, horror and science fiction—with a bit of humor thrown in for good measure."

Seeing the comics industry as one of feast or famine, Sharp admits, "I had started to lose a bit of faith" having a famine run of late. "My family life has continued to grow throughout all the tough times, and I don't judge myself by my readership any longer. I judge myself by my friends, my family, and the people who love me. It's a much more healthy way to be, I think." But something did grow out of all this: "Discovering that I *do* still love this medium," Sharp says, "and that people do want to see this kind of work."

And if you think Sharp is going to kick back and just let the book make itself, have no fear. "I've always wanted to write and illustrate a kids book, and then there's my illustrated novel... I'd like to produce more artbooks, too. We've seen some stunning stuff! But let's just see how the first book goes!"

ALL ART BY LIAM SHARP

Vince Locke revisits the comic series that launched his career, *Deadworld*.

UNLOCKING *DEADWORLD*

VINCE LOCKE'S ZOMBIES HAVE RETURNED TO WREAK HAVOC ONCE AGAIN

By Bon Alimagno

Vince Locke, artist on such notable works as *A History of Violence* (soon to be a movie starring Viggo Mortenson) and *The Sandman*, returns to the comic that launched his career. *Deadworld*, available now from Image, chronicles the emergence of "intelligent" zombies. Locke and writer Gary Reed's first arc will retell the origin story first published by Caliber Comics almost twenty years ago. Locke hopes that his readers will take his work and "go back to look at it again and again, not toss aside after the first reading." Indeed, his is an art style that can stand the test of time.

How do you think people will react to the new *Deadworld* series?

I'm a little nervous because people seem to have fond memories of the old series that I have to live up to. Like the old one, it will be dark, moody and sometimes humorous.

How important was *Deadworld* in the development of your career?

Deadworld started my career. It was the first comic I ever worked on. The art on those early issues changed from issue to issue as I experimented with different styles. The readers were very forgiving and allowed me to learn as I went along.

How does it feel to be back doing the series?

It's a little strange going back to characters I worked on almost 20 years ago. I haven't looked back at those old issues because I want to go into the new series fresh and not rehash what I was doing then.

How would you describe your art style for the new series and how it differs from the style you would use on other comics and in your other non-comics work?

My style on the new series is very illustrative. Illustrated books and magazines from the early 1900's are a major influence and I've tried to achieve that look in my comic work. Since *Deadworld* is in black and white, I can build up as much line work and texture as I want. I usually have to hold back a bit on color books.

What interested you in the medium?

I think that like all people in comics I had a desire to tell stories.

Who were your influences?

Dave Sim, Jon J. Muth, Kent Williams and Bill Sienkiewicz: it was through them that I realized comics didn't have to be superheroes with glossy art.

How did you get started in comics?

I did a couple of short stories for a *Fantastic Fanzine* run by Ralph Griffith and Stuart Kerr. Soon after they decided to start Arrow Comics and they asked me to do the art for *Deadworld*. When Arrow quit publishing I retained the rights to the book. Gary Reed ran my local comic store and was considering starting his own comic company. To be honest, I think I shopped it around to a few other companies and he was the only one that wanted it. It turned out better than I could have hoped. It was a good business move going to Caliber and I got to hang out with a great group of artists.

"I haven't looked back... I want to go into the new series fresh."

Are you being consulted for *History of Violence*? What is your role in the movie's production?

I don't have any input on the movie. I haven't seen the script, but I don't believe there are any drastic changes. Of course it will differ from the book, but in the end it should still be the same story.

What's next for you?

Right now I'm concentrating on *Deadworld*. I hope people enjoy it so I can continue to work on it for a while. I'm also doing watercolor and oil paintings on the side just for myself.

ALL ART BY VINCE LOCKE

ONE MAN ARMY

JOSH HOWARD'S DOING IT ALL ON THE BREAKOUT HIT *DEAD@17*

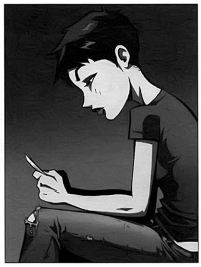
By Jim Catapano

Josh Howard's *Dead@17* series is one of the most popular titles from Viper Comics. The saga of Nara Kilday, a murdered teen raised from the dead to kill zombies, has unfolded through two miniseries (*Dead@17* and *Blood of Saints*). A third, *Revolution*, dawned in November 2004. The series was honored as the Best Horror Title in the 2004 Everything But Imaginary Awards.

To date, Howard has been a one-man band, handling all the scripting, penciling, inking and coloring. "There are times when it's great and other times when it's not so great," he says of going solo. "I love having control over everything, but sometimes some things suffer because of it. Time is my biggest enemy. I feel that people have yet to see my full potential as an artist because I'm constantly racing against the clock. Hopefully, that will change soon." Does he foresee a time when he'll bring others in? "I'm not opposed to working with a team, there's just a lot of personal projects I'd like to get done first."

Though all three *Dead* series have been handled solely by Howard, the *Dead@17: Rough Cut* special opens the world up to new voices and artists. The 48 page book features four stories by Alex Hamby, Jason Burns, David Hopkins and Egg Embry, with art by Martin Abel, Scotty Law, Sean Stephens and Ben Hall. (A fifth story, "Life@16," is by Howard.)

Howard enjoyed letting other talents tackle his characters. "It's really fun actually. When I was giving out writing assignments, I was surprised by how little I had to suggest changes. Most everyone just knocked it out of the park. They all did a great job expanding on my work and coming up with ideas that I wish I'd thought of. And of course, any time I get to see another artist depict my characters, it's just pure joy."



Josh Howard's art from the third *Dead@17* series, *Revolution*.

Following the *Revolution* miniseries, *Dead@17* will become an ongoing series. Readers can expect to see some changes when Nara moves her adventures to a regular series. "For starters, I don't feel any need to repeat myself," says Howard. "So, don't expect anyone wielding an ax and chopping up zombies. There will probably be a little less action, at least in the beginning. The threats are going to be more subtle and in the shadows."

"I feel that people have yet to see my full potential..."

As with most series featuring strong heroines, *Dead@17* has endured endless (and exaggerated) "Buffy" comparisons. Howard is eager to move further away from this notion: "I want to explore different corners of the *Dead@17* world and get into more of the overall mythology of the whole thing. The tone will be closer to 'Millennium' than 'Buffy'."

In the 21st Century, the Internet seems to be a quick and easy way to ascertain the pulse of the fanbase. Howard prefers to stay clear of the numerous fan forums: "I used to look around quite a bit, but not so much anymore," he says of them. "People are more likely to post something negative than positive, if at all. That's just the nature of the Internet, I guess."

According to Howard, physical reality is still far more accurate than virtual. "I'm constantly surprised at the number of people coming to see me and buying my books at conventions, telling me how big fans they are. It blows my mind. If I were to judge my fan base by what I see on the Internet, there's only about 3 people reading my books."

With three miniseries under his belt, Howard is poised to take *Dead@17* into other media.

"*Dead@17* is making the rounds in Hollywood," says Howard. "There's a production studio and writer involved, but it's still too early to announce anything official yet."

Whether in comic shops or on the big screen, we certainly haven't heard the last of Josh Howard.

ALL ART BY JOSH HOWARD

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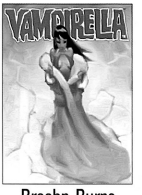

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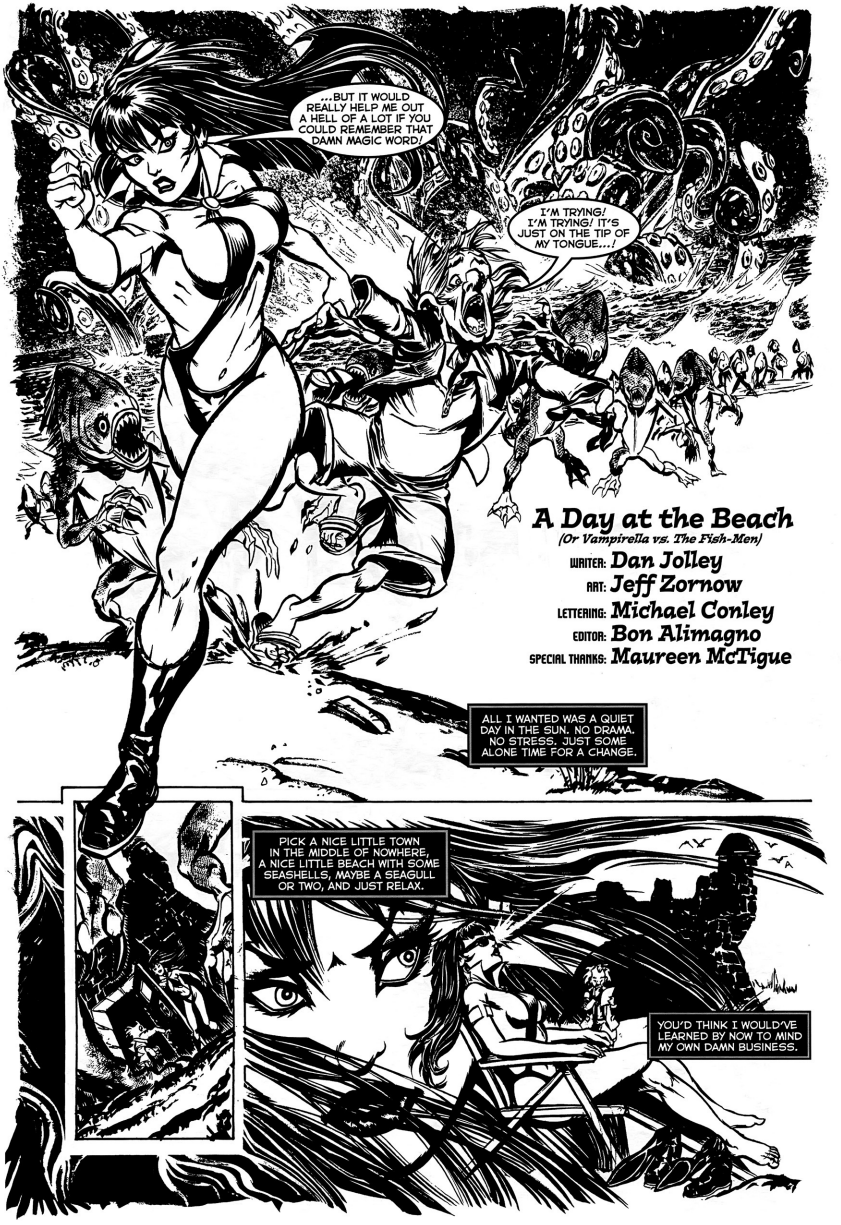
A Day at the Beach
[OR VAMPIRELLA VS. THE FISH-MEN!]
DR. SKINKBLOT, YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY A SMART PERSON.
WELL, I WOULDN'T WANT TO BRAG...
TOP VALUE
BAIT
I MEAN, YOU HAVE TO BE PRETTY ON THE BALL TO HAVE A HOME THIS BIG AND THIS NICE, RIGHT?
I DO POSSESS A CERTAIN FLAIR FOR ACADEMIA, IT'S TRUE.
NOW, I KNOW REALLY SMART PEOPLE ARE A LITTLE SCATTERBRAINED SOMETIMES...
A SIGN OF GENIUS, TRULY.


...BUT IT WOULD REALLY HELP ME OUT A HELL OF A LOT IF YOU COULD REMEMBER THAT DAMN MAGIC WORD!
I'M TRYING! I'M TRYING! IT'S JUST ON THE TIP OF MY TONGUE...!
A Day at the Beach
(Or Vampirella vs. The Fish-Men)
WRITER: Dan Jolley
ART: Jeff Zornow
LETTERING: Michael Conley
EDITOR: Bon Alimagno
SPECIAL THANKS: Maureen McTigue
ALL I WANTED WAS A QUIET DAY IN THE SUN. NO DRAMA. NO STRESS. JUST SOME ALONE TIME FOR A CHANGE.
PICK A NICE LITTLE TOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, A NICE LITTLE BEACH WITH SOME SEASHELLS, MAYBE A SEAGULL OR TWO, AND JUST RELAX.
YOU'D THINK I WOULD'VE LEARNED BY NOW TO MIND MY OWN DAMN BUSINESS.

I SAY, YOUNG LADY, I WONDER IF I MIGHT IMPOSE UPON YOU FOR A MOMENT?
UM. SURE. LET'S SEE...
I'VE FORGOTTEN MY GLASSES, AND IF YOU COULD JUST TELL ME WHAT THIS WORD IS RIGHT HERE... MY HANDWRITING GETS A BIT CRAMPED...
IT LOOKS LIKE, "JARTHALOOLDOOL."
WELL I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT WAS THE FINAL WORD TO THE INCANTATION, OTHERWISE I WOULDN'T HAVE HAD YOU SAY IT OUT LOUD!
I'VE BEEN AN OCCULT RESEARCHER FOR FIFTY YEARS, I BELIEVE I'M ALLOWED ONE MISTAKE!
SURE YOU ARE-- AS LONG AS YOU FIX IT!
CAN'T YOU THINK OF THIS "COUNTER-WORD" THING AT ALL?
WELL... HMM... I'M FAIRLY SURE IT RHYMES WITH SOMETHING LATIN... OR POSSIBLY ATLANTEAN, SINCE THE SPELL DID SUMMON THESE AQUATIC CHAPS...
SKREEEE

KLONING
WELL, IT CERTAINLY DOESN'T HELP IF YOU KEEP SHOUTING AT ME!
SZZZ

WELL, I... SEEM TO RECALL WANTING SOME FRESH AIR...
WHUMP
...BECAUSE I WAS BEGINNING TO DEVELOP A HEADACHE...
...BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE MY RESEARCH BEHIND, I'D BEEN WORKING ON IT ALL NIGHT, ONLY STOPPED FOR BREAKFAST, AND--
--OH MY.
WELL. THAT'S REALLY... REALLY...
...BIG.
I KNOW! I KNOW! IT'S JUST, I CAN'T--
WHOULF!
WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME, DOCTOR!
IF THAT THING COMES ASHORE, OUR DAY'S ABOUT TO GET A HELL OF A LOT WORSE!

OH, GOD, THESE THINGS STINK!
THEY SMELL LIKE SOUR CREAM AND DOG TURDS.
SOUR CREAM... HUNGARIAN FOOD... PAPRIKA...
OF COURSE!
Kahndrika!
"KAHNDRIKA?"
KAHNDRIIIIKAAAAA...
ah, crap!

SQUOIT
SQUOIT
SQUOIT
SQUOIT
SQUOIT
SQUOIT
I REMEMBERED, YOU MADE ME THINK OF PAPRIKA, WHICH RHYMES WITH "EUREKA."
SQUOIT
EUREKA'S LATIN.
DUMBASS.
WHAP
MAKE ME SOME PANCAKES.
THE END

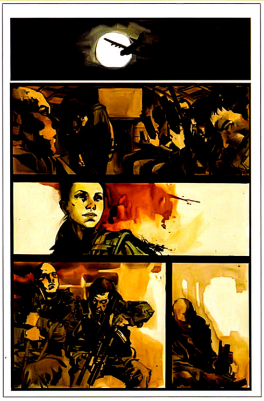
Earlier works such as these led Alexander to *Damn Nation*.

King of the Damned

Jason Alexander's explosive talent comes to DAMN NATION

By Patrick Keller

WE'RE DOOMED. We thought the Cold War was over. We thought we won. But they had another surprise for us… Lurking in a sleepy Miami port is an innocuous-looking Russian freighter with a deadly cargo. Soon, the entire United States will be in lockdown, the President in London, and the country in a seemingly endless downward spiral. One word seems to be on everyone's lips: *vampires*. ✝ Yes, ravenous, blood-sucking beasts are rampaging through the country, and it's up to a small band of survivors, led by a determined scientist and a baffled Homeland Security agent, to stop the plague before it's literally too late. But is the cure worse than the disease?



absolutely incredible. I think it's potential is immense and has barely been tapped. And as the years move on, I also see that it has yet to live up to that potential in the mainstream and fear it never will."

Alexander began creating his own comics in high school. The first, called *Section 8*, ran for 7 issues and would later continue to live on as the name of Alexander's studio, although not for the reasons one might expect. "We didn't think we really fit in with the majority of the comics industry," he says of his formative comics creation experience. "We thought of ourselves as a bit unhinged. 'Section 8' is what it's called with you are released from military duty for being mentally unstable. [We] thought it fit. I still don't know how I fit in the comics industry."

Quite a comment for one who has worked with some of the biggest names in the industry, including Sean McKeever, Ed Brubaker and Greg Rucka. He has his theories as to why they keep knocking at

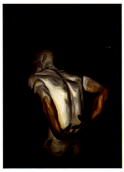
"I like Damn Nation because it's different. Not your typical vampire story. It's smarter, and way the hell scarier." - Jason Alexander

Such is the world of *Damn Nation*, brought to comics readers by the team of Andrew Cosby, noted television creator and producer of the upcoming film version of Matt Wagner's *Mage*, and artist J. ("Jason" to his friends) Alexander, who turns in the book's stunning painted artwork. Just don't mention the "v" word…

"Vampires have been done to death," Alexander says. "The whining, puffy-shirt, unisex vampires are just tiring. I like *Damn Nation* because it's *different*. Not your typical vampire story. It's smarter, and way the hell scarier. It's a good solid raw horror story."

There's definitely no "whining, puffy-shirt vampires" here. "You know when you are having a nightmare, and it's dark and something is chasing you?" Alexander elaborates. "It's absolutely horrifying what is coming up behind you, yet you feel as though you're running underwater, and you turn and see it coming, scrambling, clawing at you full blast? That's the best way to describe the tone of *Damn Nation*, I think."

It's this enthusiasm, this unique approach to the work that has drawn editors back to Alexander time and time again. "Jason approaches each page as an individual piece of art," says James Lucas Jones, editor-in-chief of Oni Press, "but unlike a lot of other artists, he knows how to make it work in the context of the story, too." Alexander did art for an arc of Oni's *Queen and Country* which earned him an Eisner



Jason Alexander's covers for *Damn Nation* #1 and #2. (Top) Interior art from the first issue

Award nomination. Jones heaps praise on Alexander, who, he says, produces "pages that wouldn't look at all out of place in a gallery, but that accomplish exactly what they're supposed to as comics as well."

Not bad for an artist without a lick of formal art training. "I grew up in a small town in Tennessee. It was an industrial town, [with] no influence for art, the type of town you're born, raised, work and die in." Fortunately, Alexander had other inspiration to draw from, no pun intended. "My father introduced me to the art world through his own interests. I became sort of a young punk comics guy. I thought that art school would push influences and methods on me that would change how I approached my work and would, hence, make it not really come from me, from within. So I avoided art school and picked up what I could on my own."

Alexander admits he came to comics later than most. "I was about 17, and though I was initially attracted to superhero-type books, I later discovered creators like Will Eisner and J. O'Barr. Artists like those really shaped my perception of what comics could be.

"My relationship with the medium has developed rather bittersweet I guess," he continues. "On the one hand, I still believe, quite strongly, that comics is one of the most perfect creative mediums in existence. In it's best form, it's a beautiful match of literature and fine art, intellect and visual stimulus. And when they come together just right, it's Section 8's door. "The interesting thing about all of those writers is that my style of art contrasts with the types of stories they write and the types of artists they typically have rendering their words. I believe I get asked to work with them to do what [only] I do, basically."

While his profile rose through years of hard work, it was, ironically, vampires that brought Alexander to *Damn Nation*. "I worked with Scott [Allie, editor at Dark Horse] on a *Buffy: Tales of the Vampires* short and [movie tie-in comics for the Universal film] *Van Helsing*. We talked about me hopefully sticking it out with Dark Horse on future projects. When he mentioned *Damn Nation*, it just sounded fun." Fun? A tale about a horrific plague and nasty monsters? Surely Jason jests… "I'm a horror nut, so this is a blast. I get to go a little more nuts artistically on this title. I'm painting the series. So the whole thing looked pretty attractive to me.

"Any time I could draw the 'infected' in the story was a blast. For an artist, it's just fun to get to paint half-naked blueish vampire things all gaunt and creepy. I'm a horror nut, and I absolutely love doing this. It's like Christmas for me."

Cosby seems to agree, having gone on the record to say that the resulting series is "real purty." But don't get too attached to anyone living in the Damn Nation, Alexander cautions. "I would love to work with Andrew again on pretty much anything, but I don't like to stay in one story too long. Right now, mini-series is the way I want to go. I can explore a story, an idea, an artistic approach and then move on. It keeps me more interested I think." We're betting it keeps the readers interested, too. Judge for yourself… if you dare.

ALL ART BY: JASON ALEXANDER

Think he'll do it?
Nah. He might touch the door, but then he'll run faster than the piss down his leg.
-- everyone knows that the Pine house is haunted.

A YEARLY TREAT

You can't change the past, but you can try to put it to rest. A six-page, full color minicomic available now from Hula Cat Comics, written by Sean Frost with art by Wendi Strang-Frost.

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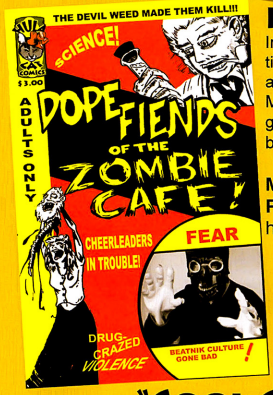

DOPE FIENDS OF THE ZOMBIE CAFE!

In Dope Fiends of the Zombie Cafe, an experimental, radioactive preservative leaks into Centerville's marijuana crop, initiating the human testing phase ahead of schedule. High school pinball champ Tommy and his best gal Betty Marie must battle beatnik zombies, poetry readings, and mad science. (Suggested for mature readers due to language, graphic violence, and one really bad toupee.)

Michael May of **Comic World News** says: "The book is hilarious. **PLASTIC FARM**'s Rafer Roberts supplies the art and it's obvious that he's enjoying this every bit as much as writer Sean Frost is."

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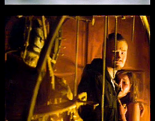
LUNACHICKS

WHEN THE MOON IS FULL THEY RISE

Elisha Cuthbert

Surviving the *House of Wax*



Hot wax, super-glued lips and creepy wax replicas of co-star Jared Padalecki—Elisha Cuthbert had her hands full while shooting this summer's *House of Wax* from producer Joel Silver and director Jaume Collet-Serra. The horror film starring Cuthbert is the fifth movie from Dark Castle Entertainment.

"When Joel brought me *House of Wax*, I thought this is perfect because the genre is different, the idea is different," Cuthbert said. "It'll be fine. I can do this, I've dealt with *24*, I know how to do this stuff."

Once they started shooting in Australia, it didn't seem quite as easy. "I got there and had no idea it was going to be so physically challenging and demanding. We had a lot of stunt stuff going on, we had a lot of things happening, and fire and wax, and lots of crazy prosthetics and things."

And there was indeed plenty of fire. Last summer, a soundstage caught on fire while testing special effects. The production lost four days, but no one was hurt.

It didn't take long for Cuthbert to push on. It was her suggestion that her lips be authentically sealed for a scene instead of faking it. "At first we had this sort of mock and I was going to act like they were glued… I want[ed] to actually pull them and make it show that I'm trying my best to unlock them."

While she didn't confront any wax duplicates of herself, she did have a lot of wax to confront. After months of first-hand encounters, Cuthbert admitted, "It was interesting, and messy. But it was fun."

Jared Padalecki, who plays Cuthbert's boyfriend, had two wax replicas of himself. Once again, Cuthbert had another first-hand encounter. "They actually scared me at one point because I ran by one of his wax figures and it looks just like him, the facial hair, everything. There's people there applying each hair on his face and head to replicate his actual structure and everything. It's incredible."

Working with Paris Hilton wasn't what she expected either. "I thought, 'Oh my God, what's going to happen, what are we going to do?' And she got there and I can't say one bad thing about her. She was there on time, she did a great job, she looked good, and she was a blast to hang out with and shoot the movie with. I can't imagine anyone else being in [the role of] Paige except for her."

House of Wax will be nationally released on May 6.—*Corey Blake*

"I've dealt with *24*, I know how to do this stuff."

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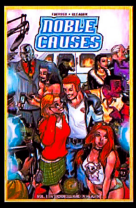

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